



# Special Report

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## Democratic vs. Republican Priorities: A Clear Choice for Women

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DPC Staff Contact: Debra Silimeo (202-224-3232)

Democratic Policy Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510-7050

Tom Daschle, Chairman  
Harry Reid, Co-Chairman



## A Clear Choice for Women

**Women** have a lot at stake now. The Republican majority has tried to roll back hard-won social and economic progress for women and to make extreme cuts in education, health care and retirement security.

**Republican budget: women lose.** The GOP budget disproportionately targeted programs that help women succeed in school, the workplace, and to manage in their retirement years. Important community and safety net programs would have been undermined. At the same time, the GOP budget provided large tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans. The GOP budget absolutely failed the fairness test, and President Clinton vetoed it.

**Democratic agenda: women gain.** This stands in sharp contrast to the Democratic Agenda. President Clinton and Democrats in Congress have pursued ways to improve the lives of women and their families, including: Family and Medical Leave, the minimum wage increase, new ways to help students and their families pay for education, and health care reforms. Democrats have put more women at decision-making tables in the highest levels of government.

Here's more on how the Democratic and Republican agendas differ on some important issues for women and their families.

## ***Economic Security***

■ **Family and Medical Leave.** President Clinton and the Democratic majorities in the 103rd Congress enacted the *Family and Medical Leave Act*, which ensures that women and men do not have to choose between their jobs and their families when they need time to care for a child, spouse, or parent. Democrats would like to expand it to allow employees to take time off for family appointments like physician visits and parent-teacher conferences.

◆ *Republicans opposed the Family Leave Act: Senator Dole voted against it and still calls it an example of “Washington telling you what you have to do.” (Washington Post 3/20/96) Some Republicans would like to weaken the act or repeal it entirely.*

■ **Minimum Wage.** Democrats fought for more than a year and a half to increase the minimum wage, against stiff Republican opposition. The vast majority of the 11.8 million workers who will benefit from the increase are adults, and most of them—58 percent—are women. (Source: Economic Policy Institute/BLS) On October 1st, millions of American workers benefitted from the first installment of a raise that will, by next year, take their hourly pay from \$4.25 to \$5.15. For a full-time worker, that’s an extra \$1,800 a year.

◆ *The House GOP Republican Leader, Dick Armey, spoke for many of his colleagues when he said he would fight the increase with “every fiber” of his being. At one point, Senate Majority Leader Dole shut down the Senate to avoid a vote. (In 1961, he opposed President Kennedy’s bill to raise the minimum wage from \$1.00 to \$1.25.)*

### **Total Number of Workers Benefiting from Increase: 11.8 Million Workers**

Female:	6.9 million
Male:	4.9 million

Source: Economic Policy Institute

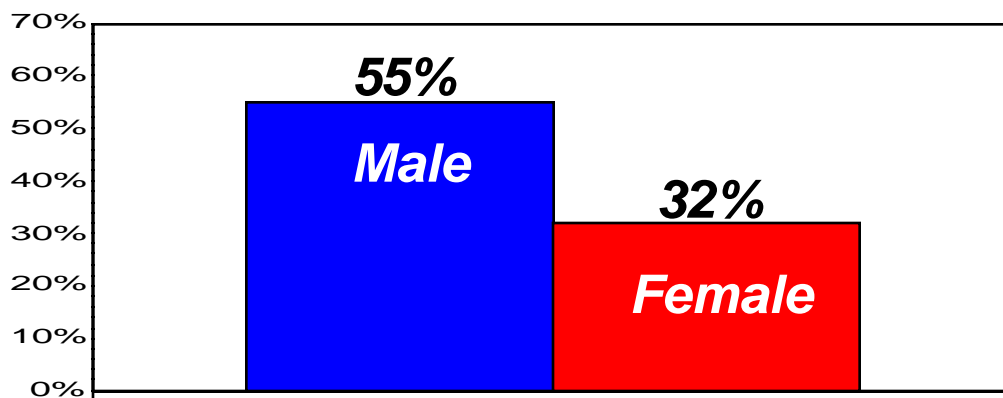
■ **Tax Credits.** Democrats expanded the working families tax credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which helps ensure that children whose parents work full-time do not have to live in poverty. Women file nearly 75 percent of all EITC claims, often as single heads of families. Some 20 million Americans take advantage of this help, with the average credit around \$1,000.

◆ *Republicans, in their FY 1996 budget, tried to slash the EITC by \$32 billion over seven years—in the same plan that provided huge tax breaks to six-figure income families. Democrats successfully blocked this tax increase on working families.*

■ **Pensions.** Democrats have taken steps to make pensions more secure, expand pension coverage, and provide specific protections for women. Women are less likely to have pensions, and their median benefit is about half that of men. The minimum wage bill that Democrats fought for includes provisions to help small businesses set up pension plans for their workers, requires clear consent forms to protect widows with respect to survivor annuities, and expands IRAs for spouses. The President's *1994 Retirement Security Act* helped make pensions more secure and reduced pension underfunding.

◆ *The GOP tax plan contained a provision that would have turned back the clock to the days when corporate raiders pulled money from employee pension funds to fund corporate takeovers. During the 1980s, firms “raided” more than \$20 billion from pension plans until Congress put an end to it.*

### **Fewer Women Receive Pensions Receipt of Benefits-Retirees 55 and Over**



Source: 1994 Current Population Survey

■ **Fair Pay.** The Democrats' Families First Agenda calls for steps to ensure that women are paid fairly in the workplace. *The Equal Pay Act* would be enforced more vigorously, and guidelines would be developed to help employers who want to enact fair pay policies.

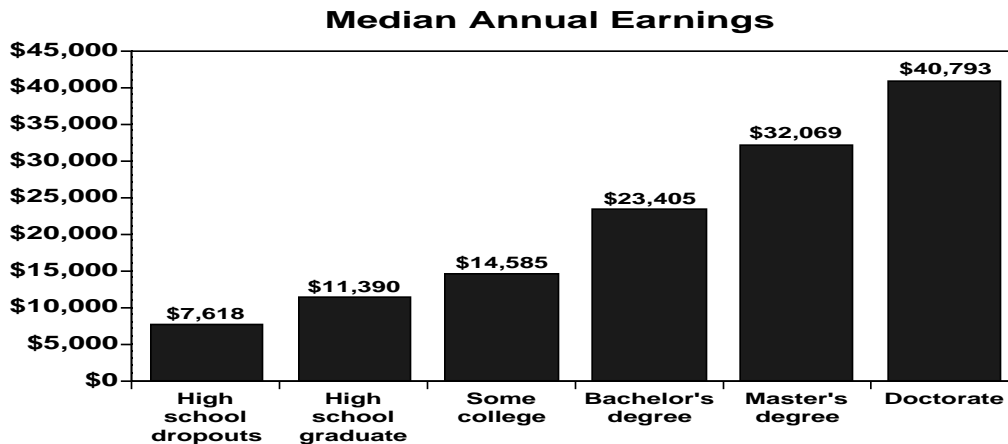
■ **Women Business Owners.** The Clinton Administration has made a focused effort to help more women start their own businesses. President Clinton increased Small Business Administration (SBA) lending to women by 86 percent and expanded the SBA effort to provide women with business skills and training. Federal contracts to women-owned businesses also increased.

## Education

■ **College Education.** Democrats have helped more young women and their families afford a college education, by expanding student loans and creating a National Service program. The Democratic Agenda proposes tax cuts targeted to education, including a \$10,000 deduction and a \$1,500 tuition tax credit.

◆ *The GOP budget would have cut education funding overall by one-third—the largest education cuts in history, this at a time when school enrollment is at an all time high. President Clinton vetoed this budget. The new GOP/Dole economic plan will mean even deeper cuts.*

### Education Makes a Big Difference for Women



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Surveys*, unpublished data.

■ **Work Place Skills.** Democrats provided help for young women who go directly from high school to the workplace through the *School-to-Work Opportunities Act*, which encourages them to enter non-traditional and better paying fields. It offers Federal seed money to leverage investments at the State, local and private sector levels so students can gain technical and workplace skills.

◆ *Republicans wanted to eliminate the School-to-Work program. Republicans also wanted to eliminate the Women's Educational Equity Act, the only program that specifically promotes educational equity for women and girls.*

## Health Care

- **Health Insurance.** Democrats always have made health care a priority. In this Congress, Democrats succeeded in passing the **Kennedy-Kassebaum** health care bill, which will help workers keep their insurance when they change jobs, and will ensure the insurance companies do not discriminate against people when they get sick. Democrats fought to end so-called “drive through deliveries,” by requiring insurers to cover a 48-hour hospital stay for new mothers.
- **Medicare-Medicaid.** Democrats also prevented Republicans from making unprecedented cuts in Medicare and Medicaid.



- ◆ *Republicans proposed cutting \$270 billion from Medicare. 57 percent of Medicare beneficiaries are women—20 million women. The GOP cuts would have doubled their premiums and copayments.*
- ◆ *The Republican plan also would have cut \$163 billion in Federal spending on Medicaid—a cut ten times more drastic than anything ever enacted before. Medicaid is the single biggest payer of nursing home bills. Seventy-five percent of nursing home residents are women.*

- ◆ *Republicans proposed eliminating Federal quality standards for nursing homes, which regulate nurse-to-patient ratios and establish treatment standards.*

■ **Mammograms.** The President wants to increase Medicare coverage for mammograms, by eliminating copayments for this important diagnostic service.

■ **Kids-Only Health Plans.** The Democratic Families First Agenda would help children who don't have health insurance by requiring private insurance companies to offer special "kids-only" health plans. Children are much less expensive to insure than adults, so this step would help families who want to cover their children but can't afford a full family policy.



## **Crime and Violence**

■ **Violence Against Women.** *The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was an important part of President Clinton's 1994 Crime bill. It is the first comprehensive Federal effort to fight the vicious cycle of family violence. The Act tripled funding for battered women's shelters and provided grants to states to bolster law enforcement, prosecution and victims services.*

◆ *Republicans proposed slashing funding for the VAWA by nearly 70 percent. Only after tremendous public pressure funding was restored.*

■ **Community Policing.** President Clinton's Crime bill will put 100,000 new cops on the street.

◆ *Republicans tried to eliminate the "Cops on the Street" program.*

■ **Gun Control.** Democrats passed and President Clinton signed into law the *Brady Bill*, which keeps an estimated 85 felons per day from buying handguns. Democrats also fought for and won a ban on assault weapons, and made it illegal for anyone convicted of a crime of domestic violence to own or possess a firearm of any kind.

*"In the area of gun control ... the President differs clearly from the Republican leadership, and he has been courageous in pushing reform and opposing backsliding. Both the Brady Bill and the assault weapons ban were passed during his Administration and with his vigorous support. Many thousands of convicted felons have been prevented from buying handguns, and some of the most dangerous weapons have been taken off the market because of these laws. Without doubt, gun control measures have been a factor in the improving crime statistics. And without doubt, President Clinton is entitled to credit for his leadership in this effort."*

*—Washington Post editorial, October 16, 1996*

◆ *Republicans adamantly opposed both the Brady Bill and the assault weapons ban. Republican leaders tried to weaken and gut the measure prohibiting those convicted of domestic violence from owning guns.*

## ***Opportunity***

■ **Affirmative Action.** Women have been major beneficiaries of affirmative action. It gives women the chance to compete for education and jobs. For example, from 1976 to 1989, the percentage of medical degrees earned by women jumped from 19 percent to 33 percent, and law degrees from 23 percent to 41 percent. President Clinton acknowledges some shortcomings in affirmative action programs, and advocates mending not ending it.

◆ *Republican leaders have vowed to end affirmative action. Senator Dole and Rep. Charles Canady cosponsored a bill that would destroy affirmative action programs for women.*

## ***Choice***

■ **Abortion.** Under current law, a women can make her own decisions about abortion. Most Democrats believe that it should remain legal, safe, and rare.

◆ *The Republican majority forced a record 53 votes on measures to limit a woman's right to make a very private decision. The GOP platform calls for a complete ban on abortion, even if a woman is raped or her life is in danger. Platforms matter—more than 75 percent of party platforms eventually become law.*

## ***A Seat at the Table***

**Women in Leadership.** The Clinton Administration has involved more women as partners in decision-making. More than 40 percent of the President's appointments are women. Two of the President's three policy-making councils in the White House are headed by women.